



Committee on
HOMELAND SECURITY
Chairman Michael McCaul

Opening Statement

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**Statement of Subcommittee Chairman John Katko (R-NY)
Subcommittee on Transportation Security
Committee on Homeland Security**

“A Review of Access Control Measures at our Nation’s Airports”

Remarks as Prepared

I would like to welcome everyone to the Subcommittee’s first hearing of the 114th Congress. I am honored to be the new Chairman of this important panel, which is charged with oversight of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) and ensuring the security of our vast and vital transportation network.

Today’s hearing on airport access control measures stems from a series of security breaches in which loaded weapons were brought onto commercial airplanes unbeknownst to TSA and airport officials. These alarming incidents could have had devastating consequences if those involved had intended to carry out an attack.

The purpose of today’s hearing is to examine current access control measures and employee vetting procedures, and begin to identify short-term and long-term solutions to close any security loopholes.

TSA spends billions of dollars every year to ensure every passenger is screened before boarding a commercial flight. That’s an important responsibility. However, we must ask ourselves: What good is all of this screening at the front door if we are not paying enough attention to the backdoor? The answer is common sense.

On December 23rd, for example, federal agents arrested Eugene Harvey, a Delta baggage handler at Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport and charged him with trafficking in firearms and violating security requirements. Harvey allegedly worked with a former Delta employee and used his Security Identification Display Area (SIDA) badge to smuggle firearms, some of them loaded, onto passenger planes bound for JFK. The FBI called this a “serious security breach” and vowed to work to prevent future breaches.

On January 13th, Port Authority police arrested a Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Aviation Safety Inspector at LaGuardia airport after he flew with a loaded firearm on a Delta flight from Atlanta to LaGuardia. The inspector, who flew inside the cockpit as part of his duties, had bypassed TSA screening at Atlanta airport by using his SIDA badge. The inspector was reassigned to other tasks and the FAA has suspended its program that allows safety inspectors to bypass screening.

Finally, on January 24th, the FBI arrested another Delta employee at Atlanta airport for boarding a flight to Paris without being screened. He used his SIDA badge to gain entry to the sterile area of the airport. The investigation is ongoing.

It raises concern that all of the most recent breaches occurred at Atlanta, one of the world's largest and busiest airports. Having said that, these incidents are just some of the latest examples of breaches at our Nation's airports; these problems are not unique to just one airport. Every case presents unique challenges and opportunities for TSA, airports, airlines, and other partners to strengthen security protocols.

I am confident that we can improve background checks, training, screening, and other measures, and I look forward to discussing these ideas today with our witnesses. I also look forward to reviewing the recommendations of the Aviation Security Advisory Committee (ASAC) in roughly 90 days, following the ASAC's in-depth review of access control measures. Furthermore, I am planning to hold a follow-up hearing focusing on that review, including how the ASAC's recommendations could be implemented at airports nationwide.

The reality is that the threats we face today are not the same threats we faced two, three, or even four years after 9/11. Nearly 14 years later, terrorists have adapted to our security protocols in ways that require us to be agile and resourceful. We cannot afford to be set in our ways and risk missing a glaring vulnerability. I hope this hearing is the beginning of a meaningful dialogue on the changes that need to be made at our Nation's airports.

I now recognize the Ranking Member of the Subcommittee, the Gentlewoman from New York, Ms. Rice, for an opening statement.

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